Racial Disproportionality Project

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wisconsin department of
children + families

DCF Values

This project is guided by the following principals:

- **All children should be safe, nurtured and engaged.**

- **All children and families served by the child welfare system deserve respect and equitable treatment.**

Guiding Principles

- **Neither race nor ethnicity will predict a child's pathway through or outcome in Wisconsin's child welfare system;**

- **Safe environments are needed to encourage and promote open and honest dialogue;**

- **Data will be used to guide the conversations; it is important to also discuss the stories behind the data;**

- **The safe reduction of disproportionality in the welfare system creates opportunities for learning and improved outcomes for all children and families.**

Scope of Inquiry

Project Scope:

This project will identify key indicators of disproportionality to target performance improvement at the department level and at the county and regional levels. This information will be used to make improvements in our systems, processes, and practice.

Analysis Scope:

1. How do we understand the racial disparities that exist at the system entry point?

2. What strategies are necessary to address disparities in service delivery or performance outcomes within the child welfare system?

Disproportionality at the system entry point

Entry into Wisconsin's child welfare system:

- **<u>As compared to the entire child population:</u>**

    African American children are 2.5 times more likely than white children to be screened in.

    From this vantage point, it looks like African American children are **overrepresented** and fewer should be screened in.

The intersection between race and poverty in child welfare

- Low income is associated with other factors that are likely to contribute to maltreatment such as substance abuse and mental health issues.

- In Wisconsin, 44% of African American children are living in poverty, as compared with 9% of Caucasian children.

Race / Ethnicity	Percent of WI children of this race/ethnicity living in poverty
Caucasian	9%
Hispanic	27%
African American	44%

The intersection between race and poverty in child welfare

Nationally, children from families with annual incomes below $15,000 are 22 times more likely to experience maltreatment when compared to families with annual incomes of $30,000.

It has been found that the more risk factors that are controlled for the less likely studies are to find racial bias in the child welfare system.

<u>As compared to children in poverty:</u>

African American children are about half as likely as Caucasian children to be screened in, as compared to their proportion of the children in poverty.

From this vantage point, it looks like African American children are underrepresented in the screened in population.

The intersection between race and poverty in child welfare

These facts help us understand that changing the child welfare decision making process simply to reduce the number of African American children in the child welfare system is likely to put those same children at risk.

Rather then looking at that decision making process, we should be focusing on the realities of maltreatment and developing prevention/early intervention programming to address the risk factors that lead to maltreatment.

Disproportionality within the system

Once a child/family is in the child welfare system, there should be no disparity in treatment.

- There should be no difference in how often a social worker meets their initial contact timeframes based on race. African American children in Wisconsin are .92 times as likely as Caucasian children to be seen within the timeframes.

- An African American child is .94 times as likely as a Caucasian child to have 2 or more placements in a 12 month period.

- An African American child is .86 times as likely as a Caucasian child to be reunified within 12 months. This is a disparity in the outcomes for African American children.

Relative Rates African American/White

	Total Population	
Initial Face to Face Occurred Timely	0.92	Relative Rate Index (RRI) describes the likelihood that an event will happen to a child of color as compared to a Caucasian child. In this instance, an African American child is .86 times as likely as a Caucasian child to be reunified within 12 months.
Children with 2 or fewer placements	0.94	
Children reunified within 12 months	0.86	

Measures Under Study

System Entry

Screening decisions relative to population/poverty

Performance/Service Outcomes

CPS Activity

- **Timely initial face to face contact**
- **Timely Initial Assessment completion**
- **Initial Assessment disposition**

Placement Activity

- **Children with 2 or fewer placements**
- **Children reunified within 12 months**
- **Monthly face to face contacts**
- **Finalized adoptions for children in care 17+ months**

Project Time Line

Phase I
- Select final indicators, refine and automate data computations
- Explore data by counties to understand which counties have large enough populations to include in analysis
- Finalize better inclusion of data by race into annual reports

Phase II
- Analyze data trends over time to pinpoint consistent problem areas of over/under representation
- Seek feedback on data and trends with key internal and external stakeholders
- Develop a communication plan to disseminate results of preliminary study

Phase III
- Develop and implement action plans based on trends of disparity
- Work with QSR staff to include disproportionality into analysis of pre-QSR data for counties with large enough populations

Summary

This project will support DCF values in the following ways:

- **All children should be safe, nurtured and engaged.**

System entry should be equitably based on child and family safety needs.

- **All children and families served by the child welfare system deserve respect and equitable treatment.**

Understanding the complexities of racial disparities in the Wisconsin child welfare system will promote targeted intervention strategies.

This project will build a framework for ongoing analysis of disproportionality for the state, regions and larger counties, with the ultimate goal of targeting strategies to inequities that may exist within the child welfare system.

Special Thanks

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<u>Workgroup members:</u>

Maria Cancian, DCF and IRP

John Elliott, DCF SO

Sam Harshner, DCF OPQA

Wendy Henderson, DCF DSP

Michelle Rawlings, DCF DSP

Kristina Trastek, DCF DSP

Resources

Research Sources:

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Bartholet, Elizabeth. "The Racial Disproportionality Movement in Child Welfare: False Facts and Dangerous Directions." Arizona Law Review 51. (2009): 871-932.

Erik P. Johnson et al., *Racial Disparity in Minnesota's Child Protection System*, Child Welfare, July-Aug 2007.

Wisconsin Child welfare data from eWiSACWIS.

Populations from the ACS Community Survey and Easy Access to Juvenile Populations http://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/ezapop/.